



# IDEA'97 UPDATE

A MONTHLY FAX BULLETIN FROM OSERS ON IDEA'97 ACTIVITIES

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## ASSESSMENT WORKING CONFERENCE MEMBERS IDENTIFY ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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January 7 through 9, 1998, Judith Heumann, Assistant Secretary for OSERS, and Tom Hehir, Director of OSEP, hosted a working conference to discuss how to best achieve the goals of the new assessment provisions of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments of 1997. Approximately 40 individuals from around the country attended, including state-level special education personnel, state and federal educational assessment personnel, representatives of national organizations, parents of children with disabilities, researchers, technical assistance providers, and federal officials. The participants identified issues and made recommendations on such topics as alternate assessments, test accommodations and modifications, reporting and accountability, intended and unintended consequences of the new assessment provisions, policy development, professional development, individualized planning, and monitoring. Reports of the conference discussions and recommendations are currently being developed for public distribution. For further information on the assessment of students with disabilities, you may wish to contact the National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO), an OSEP-funded technical assistance and dissemination provider. Address: National Center On Educational Outcomes; University of Minnesota; 250 Elliott Hall; 75 East River Road; Minneapolis, Minnesota; 55455; Telephone: (612) 626-1530; FAX: (612) 624-0879; **Web Site:** <<http://www.coled.umn.edu/NCEO>>. Also, on September 29, 1997, Assistant Secretaries Judith Heumann (OSERS) and Norma Cantu (OCR) signed a Dear Colleague which provided policy guidance on the assessment provisions of students with disabilities in federal disability law. A copy of this Dear Colleague can be obtained through the **IDEA'97 web site** at: <<http://www.ed.gov/offices/OSERS/IDEA/>>.

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## LETTER TO THE FIELD: HEHIR HIGHLIGHTS POSITIVE INCLUSION TRENDS

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In a letter to State and local special education directors, dated February 9, 1998, OSEP Director Tom Hehir has asked for feedback on how additional FY 1997 appropriated special education funds are being used to insure better results for students with disabilities and outlined how a variety of states were using additional funds appropriated for FY 1996. He also noted several positive trends which may indicate that efforts to provide more inclusive educational opportunities for students with disabilities are taking hold. They are:

**An increase in the use of inclusive settings** -- Over the past four years the number of students with disabilities education in general education classes for 80% of the day or more has increased by 20%.

**A decrease in separate schooling for students with mental retardation** -- Over the past four years, the number of students with mental retardation educated in separate public schools has decreased by 38%; residential placements have decreased by 43%;

**A greater number of students completing school** -- In 1995 -1996, 73% of students with disabilities completed school with a diploma or a certificate compared to 71.3% in the 92-93 school year. A copy of the letter will be available on the **IDEA'97 web site** soon.

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## MEMO TO THE FIELD: GUIDANCE FORWARDED TO STATES ON STATE PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT GRANTS

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An OSEP Memorandum (98-4) dated, February 26, 1998, is being forwarded to States and other interested parties, which provides answers to frequently asked questions about the new IDEA'97 State Improvement Grant Program. The purpose of this discretionary grant program is to assist State educational agencies, and their partners in reforming and improving their systems for providing educational, early intervention, and transitional services, including their systems for professional development, technical assistance, and dissemination of knowledge about best practices. Copies are available by calling: Anthony White at (202) 205-9154. Also, this guidance will soon be posted on the IDEA'97 web site page under "Letters and Memos."

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## JANUARY SATELLITE TOWN MEETING EMPHASIZES HIGH EXPECTATIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

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"If school reforms are to be truly successful we cannot have an educational system that is defined by low expectations for any child, disabled or non-disabled", stated Secretary of Education Richard Riley at the January broadcast of the Department's Satellite Town Meeting (STM) series, entitled, "*Serving Students with Disabilities; What Families, Schools and Communities Need To Know*". Secretary Riley and Assistant Secretary Heumann hosted the program which included: Bill Henderson, principal of the O'Hearn Elementary school in Boston, MA - a fully inclusive school; Julie Ashworth, a teacher from Sioux Falls, South Dakota; Nicole Harper, from the OSEP-funded Parent Training and Information Center in New Jersey -- SPAN; and Mark Donovan from the Marriott Foundation for Individuals with Disabilities. Each participant shared his or her perspective on how the new law improves results for students with disabilities. The program also emphasized the need to focus, at all levels, on higher standards and results; partnerships between students, teachers, parents, administrators and businesses; and the importance of teaching and learning for better results.

**For Further Information, contact:**  
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